

ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

pecially in relation to the Emperor. Mentioning his real name, appearing in his presence with any but the prescribed costume and ceremonial, breaking out of hierarchic order, are but a few of the many errors into which one could fall. There were penalties for entering the imperial palace, for failure to follow the proper forms regarding the cortege, lighting, and care of the imperial suite when the Emperor travelled. Omissions of omission were punished with as much severity as those of commission. Honours and precedence are regulated with a minutia irritating to the more spontaneous Western mind. The fact that laws on these dominate all of Annamite legislation shows how important a place they held as a symbol and cohesive force in Annamite society.

Inspired as always by Confucius, the Annamite civil code has allowed public utility to dominate all other relationships. Individuals are important only in so far as they constitute one of the three main social groups—family, commune, and state. The family is the basic social unit and the kw never interferes in its internal affairs. The *etat civil* of its members has never been publicly recorded. Birth, marriage, and death are strictly family matters which are legally regulated only when they lie on a wide social significance. Grounds for divorce, the time and categories of persons one is forbidden to marry, the periods of mourning, the imperative adoption of male heirs—all are fixed by strict rules.

Children and grandchildren cannot without special permission set up separate establishment so long as their parents live, nor can they assess property of their own. In the same way the state considers the commune as an extension of the family, and will tolerate no change in its location, & domicile lest it be only a means of escaping communal burdens. In

the division of property, all the children have equal
 rights, no matter
 what their sex or the legal status of their mother. Only
 the oldest son
 is given a larger share since he becomes the head of
 the family and,
 therefore, administrator of their joint property or
hung-hoa. There is
 great variety in the rank of wives, and the husband is
 severely penalized
 if he undermines his first wife's status by elevating a
 concubine. The
 first wife's place in the home is an honoured one:
 she can choose
 her successors to her husband's favour—who unlike
 herself have a
 negligible legal and social status—and bring up their
 children as her
 own. If the first wife does not remarry after her
 husband's death, she
 becomes a life beneficiary of the family
 property.

The code upholds the authority of the head of the
 family, originally
 the absolute master whose despotic hand time and
 custom have tempered. Nowadays the father's rights over his
 family are those of